Castlemaine Naturalist

64

DECEMBER 1981

ORCHIDS OF THE CASTLEMAINE DISTRICT

by Rita Mills

THE SCENTED SUN ORCHID

(Thelymitra megalyptra syn;aristata)

Flowers - October/November

This lovely orchid is quite common in this area, its bright blue flowers standing out brilliantly when it is open around midday to 2 p.m. Not all specimens are as well flowered as shown. Some only have a few small flowers.

The plant can be from 15 cm to as much as 50 cm high, with a single rather spathulate+ leaf, usually 2-3 cm wide. The column is the best way to identify most Sun Orchids, which is often a tricky task.

I've tried to illustrate the column of megalyptra with its large white"brushes" and yellow-brown "dome" and wide open front. This year on one of the Wednesday evening walks a pure white Scented Sun Orchid was found - a very lovely specimen.

(+ Spathulate = having a broad rounded apex, tapering to the base, somewhat in the form of a spoon or spatula.)

THE BIRDS OF MOSQUITO FLAT

This was the title of the talk given by Dr. F. Harrap of Ballarat to the November meeting of the club.

Report by Rita Mills

Dr Harrap's talk at the November meeting, along with the slides both his own and from the Bird Observer's club, gave many members an ambition to invite him to lead us on an excursion to Mosquito Flat, S.W. of Carisbrook, sometime next year.

Of the 120 or so birds which he has recorded for the Bird Atlas during 62 visits over the past 2½ years, the Owlet Nightjar is his obvious favourite.

Blossom is good in the area, starting in February. Nesting starts about July. On a good day, Dr Harrap said, it is possible to see up to 10 species of Honeyeater, including the White-naped, Brown-headed, Black-chimned, Painted, Fuscous, Singing, Yellow-plumed, and Yellow-winged.

Often seen at the right season are White-browed Woodswallows in their hundreds, while Dusky Woodswallows are seen all year round. White-winged Trillers and White-backed swallows also may be seen with them.

Much of the area is typical Goldfields Box-Ironbark bush with some Yellow Gums, but there is a large dam which used to serve Carisbrook as a reservoir, which now attracts swallows, waterbirds and waders, such as Red-kneed Dotterel, Grey Teal, Black Duck, recently a Musk Duck, and Yellow-billed Spoonbills. Occasionally there are also ibis and cormorants. Choughs and mudlarks make use of the mud for their nests.

Some of the singers are Golden Whistlers, Rufous Whistlers, large numbers of Olive-backed Orioles, and one Gilbert's Whistler - which is never a common bird.

Some of the more colourful birds include Rainbow Birds, Sacred and Red-backed Kingfishers, Flame, Redcapped and Scarlet Robins, Mistletoe Birds and the Superb Blue Wren. Also found there are the shy Chestnut-rumped Hylacola, Painted Quail, Spotted Quail Thrush, Owlet Nightjar, plus the anything but shy Restless Flycatcher.

On the 11th of August this year, Dr Harrap took an English visitor to Mosquito Flat for an outing, and they recorded sixty different species for the day, which says much for the area and for Dr Harrap's knowledge and powers of observation.

NUMBATS

By - Terry Collins

A mere ten years ago these bandicoot-like striped marsupials from W.Aust. were considered relatively common. The popular conception of numbats flitting from one hollow log to another in the "Wandoo" belt of W.A. is very mistaken. The logs are empty and the survival of these inoffensive little creatures is doubtful. The reason for their decline seems to be, as usual, "man-made". Land clearing reducing their range, the use of fire to clear the ground robs them of cover and feed as they feed exclusively on termites that live on the fallen timber. Added to that, the introduction of foxes and feral cats has probably sealed their fate.

Already the extinction of the Rusty Numbat (so-called for its rich red pelage along the back of its flank) is probable. The Rusty Numbat lived in South Australia and New South Wales, particularly around the Murray-Darling junction and extended north to the Menindee Lakes area and eastward to Swan Hill and south along the flood plain to Murray Bridge. The last sighting in N.S.W. was early this century and they disappeared from the rest of the system soon after. A brief respite occured in S.A. when, in 1933 a small colony was discovered in the Everhard Ranges in the North-West. In 1950 a single specimen was collected in the Northern Warburton Ranges in W.A. That was the last sighting of the Rusty Numbat.

The Taronga Zoo in Sydney has tried to breed the Banded Numbat in captivity but although they have managed to mate and bring about the birth of a few offspring in each case the survival of the young has been for only a few weeks. Even the adults succumb to a fungal infection of the gut, so the conclusion is that Numbats could never survive on the East coast as they seem to have no immunity to the micro-organisms carried in the Eastern airstreams, not even immunity from the least virulent fungi. No Numbats are currently held in captivity.

So their future lies in Western Australia. In 1980 the W.A. Dept. of Fisheries and Wildlife assigned a zoologist to study them and an appeal for funds has been made to the World Wildlife Fund Australia to further the research.

Let's hope they are not too late to rescue this little animal from certain extinction.

NOTES FROM THE DIARY OF A BIRD OBSERVER

by Stan Bruton

Recently while on our way to visit Boort, we were having morning tea at a picnic table beside the Serpentine Post Office when I went to try to see the bird which was calling. It seemed to be away across the highway so I headed back towards my cup of coffee. As I did so a small brown bird shaped like a Wattle-bird flew into a low eucalypt which was loaded with scarlet blossoms.

First look with the glasses I saw the pale blue face of a Little Friar Bird. Audrey had a good look at it too. This is only the second time I've seen this bird in Victoria(though we were familiar with it in Queensland)having seen one last summer at the old broken bridge on Lake Laanecoorie, with the Castlemaine Field Naturalist Club.

One Saturday recently, returning from Lyall Glen with Frank Meyer, I saw an immature Crimson Rosella flash across in front of the car. It flew to a post and disappeared into the hollow, so I backed down a bit, and we went to investigate. It flew out when I approached so I assumed it to be a young bird visiting its birthplace.

Frank said he couldn't see any nest, so I got a mirror from the car and with it reflected the bright sunshine like searchlight right down about 1.5 m to 3 snow-white eggs, almost round.

Apart from never having seen into a Rosella's nest, I found this discovery interesting because the nesting bird had not yet grown its beautiful crimson and blue plumage, though the all green immature plumage had given way on the underparts to crimson.

I hope no other travellers along that busy road interfere with nature's process of reproducing some of the world's most gorgeous parrots.

An Historical Note on the Bower-Bird

from - the files of the Mt Alexander Mail

M. Pouchet, Director of the Rouen Museum of Natural History , in his new work, thus describes the habits of this curious bird :- "The Speckled Chlamyder (sic) is a bird resembling our partridge, but it is distinguished by its deep colour relieved by clear spots, and by its neck which is adorned by a red(sic) collar. For the location of their nest the couple choose an open spot exposed to the sun. Their first care is to make a path of round pebbles; when they deem it sufficiently thick, they plant in it a little avenue of branches. They are seen, for this purpose, to bring from the country slender shoots of trees, of about the same size, which they thrust solidly by the thick

NOTES FROM THE COMMITTEE

Meeting held 26th of November, 1981.

The treasurer reported a bank balance of $32 but that there were some bills yet to pay.

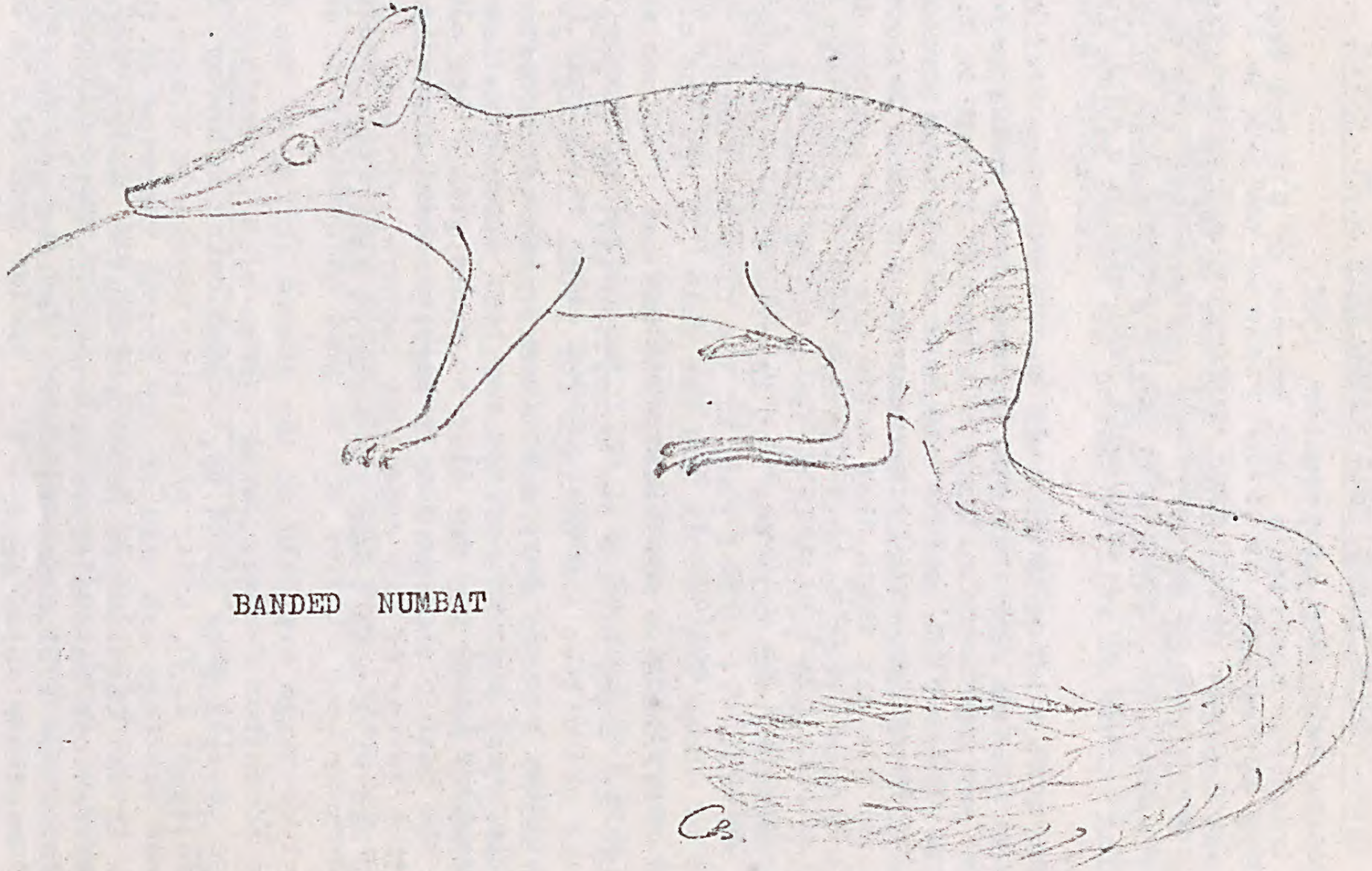
It was decided to introduce another category of membership, to be known as a Supporting Member. The fee for this will be $5 above the ordinary membership, which will entitle the member to be known as a Supporting Member as well as having the normal rights of ordinary members.

As the next meeting which will be the February meeting will also be the Annual General Meeting, the importance of having new members on the Committee was mentioned. It is felt that it is not in the long-term interests of the club to have the same old faces (some of them very old and weatherbeaten as well) appearing on the executive year after year. So although you may think that there are other members in the club who know a lot more about Natural History than you do, that is really not the point. We need people with fresh ideas about the way the club should function, and this may not involve much knowledge about Natural History at all. It is not good if the club is thought to be the preserve of those few people who are able to use the correct scientific name for everything(or nearly everything).

One of the tasks of the new committee will be to draw up a syllabus of evening activities and outings for 1982. Although you may not be on the committee, you may have a contact or know of someone who would be a suitable guest speaker, or you may have some favourite spot in the bush somewhere which you may like to share with other club members. If such is the case please do not be bashful about communicating this information to one of the committee members, who will be extremely grateful and will pass it on at the nest committee meeting.

General meetings are held on the second Friday of the month at 8 p.m. in the Education Centre, Castlemaine.
Outings usually take place on the following Saturday, leaving the Ed. Centre at 1.30, after organising people into cars, etc.
Business meetings are held on the fourth Thursday of the month, at 8 p.m. in the Castlemaine Education Centre, Mostyn Street.
Any alterations in the above arrangements will be notified.
Members of the public and intending members are cordially invited to attend meetings or outings.

President :	Mr G. Sitch	Ph 72 2734
Secretary :	Mrs M. Lindsay	72 2720
Treasurer :	Mr F. Meyer	72 1958
Newsletter:	Mr G. Broadway	72 2513



BANDED NUMBAT

end into the interstices of the stones. The branches are disposed in two parallel rows, converging in such a manner that they form a miniature shrubbery. The plantation is a yard in length, and is sufficiently wide to allow the two birds to walk alongside each other in the interior. This grove being finished they devote themselves to embellishing. Each starts out foraging in the fields and brings back all the sparkling objects it can pick up - pearl shells, bird's feathers all that can charm the eye. These trophies are suspended at the entrance to the grove, which soon begins to shine in the sun like a palace of the Arabian Nights. In the places frequented by the chlamydera if a traveller loses his watch, his knife, his seal, he does not spend his time looking for it on the ground - he knows where to find it.

Mt Alexander Mail - Sat oct 3rd, 1868

(M Pouchet must have received his data from someone else, if he had himself seen one of our Bower-birds he would scarcely have mentioned a red collar. The above includes other misconceptions as present-day ornithological research shows)

Contributed by Mrs C. McDougall to Ray Bradfield.

BELL'S SWAMP BIRDLIST

The following list was compiled on the outing to Bell's Swamp which was held in November.

Hoary -headed Grebe
Little Pied Cormorant
White-necked Heron
White-faced Heron
Nankeen Night Heron
Yellow-billed Spoonbill
Black Swan
Mountain Duck
Grey Teal
Dusky Moorhen
Coot
Masked Plover
Little Corella
Eastern Rosella
Sacred Kingfisher
White-eared Honeyeater
White-plumed Honeyeater
Red Wattlebird
Magpie
And - one egg $3\frac{1}{2}$" x 2" Discoloured by water

Calendar 1982

The committee has drawn up a tentative list of activities for the first part of 1982 as follows:-

Friday, February 12.

Annual General Meeting. Speaker - the retiring President, Mr Geoff Sitch. His subject will be "The Seasons in Castlemaine"

Saturday, February 13

Outing; Expedition Pass Reservoir. As February is usually a hot dry month, we will visit a spot where there is some water in the hope of finding some birds in the area.

Friday, March 12

Meeting: Education Centre. The speaker will be Mr J. Warden. Mr Warden is a teacher of science at the Castlemaine High School and has had considerable experience in mammal surveys. His subject will be "The Mammals of the Castlemaine Area".

Saturday, March 13

Outing : The Garden of St Erth. Simmons Reef near Blackwood. This garden is run by Mr T.R. Garnett who writes a weekly gardening column in the "Age" every Tuesday and by Mrs Garnett. Since retiring to Simmons Reef they have developed an interesting garden around an old Cornish miner's cottage in a most beautiful setting. The garden contains sections devoted to herbs, vegetables, English shrubs, Australian natives, etc. There is also a nature walk down through a fern gully where many birds may be seen including the Rufous Fantail. In the bush nearby there is a suitable picnic spot.

Saturday, April 10

Outing : to Maldon. Subject "The Geology of Maldon".

The above have been suggested, but some alterations to plans may be made when the situation is reviewed in early 1982.

Friday, December 11.

Meeting: Guest speaker will be Mr Tim Entwisle of Yapeen. The subject of his talk will be "Algae" Since completing his education at Castlemaine High School Tim has done a Science degree at the University of Melbourne. As this will be the last meeting for 1981, it has been sugested that we might bring along a few goodies for an enhanced supper table.

Saturday, December 12.

Excursion : Hamilton's Crossing. Leader will be Mrs Cheesman. Depart Ed. Centre at 1.30.